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ABSTRACT

Education in the United States is currently in the midst of a crisis of purpose. Without a mission, the schools can operate both comprehensively and efficiently, but they cannot be effective. Because the schools cannot clarify what it is they are supposed to do, they can be asked to do whatever anyone wants them to do. With a clear mission, the schools can sort through requests and accept only those consistent with their mission. The schools' ultimate mission is simply to provide all children with academic learning. This does not mean the schools should not feed and transport students, provide athletic opportunities and health instruction, and teach students how to drive. It does mean that schools should do these things in the context of their essential academic mission. Perhaps the most significant way of accomplishing this is to ensure that the curriculum developers and lead teachers have a combination of strong academic background and ability to make sense of academic disciplines for young people. In addition, educational leaders must be true leaders and not just managers; complex organizations seldom have the capacity to abandon functions, but educational leaders must get school systems to eliminate aspects of yesterday to make room for tomorrow. (KM)

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EXCELLENCE IN WHAT?: FOCUSING ON WHAT SCHOOLS ARE SUPPOSED TO DO

-- Robert R. Spillane

January 22, 1990

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EXCELLENCE IN WHAT?:
FOCUSING ON WHAT SCHOOLS ARE SUPPOSED TO DO

-- Robert R. Spillane

EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE IS A COMMON GOAL IN NEW YORK, IN VIRGINIA, IN ALL SCHOOL SYSTEMS IN ALL PARTS OF THIS NATION. BUT WHAT DO WE MEAN BY "EXCELLENCE"? EXCELLENCE IN WHAT? WE CANNOT ANSWER QUESTIONS LIKE THESE WITHOUT TAKING A LONG AND A CLOSE LOOK AT THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLS. I AM GLAD THAT YOU HAVE ASKED ME TO SPEAK AT THIS CONFERENCE, BECAUSE I BELIEVE THAT CLARIFYING THE SCHOOLS' MISSION IS THE MOST IMPORTANT TASK WHICH EDUCATORS HAVE BEFORE THEM.

LET ME BEGIN BY SAYING WHY I THINK CLARIFYING OUR MISSION IS SO IMPORTANT. AN ORGANIZATION WITHOUT A MISSION CAN OPERATE VERY COMPREHENSIVELY AND EVEN EFFICIENTLY. IT CAN KEEP ITS EMPLOYEES BUSY. IT CAN HOUSE AND FEED ITS CLIENTS OR CUSTOMERS AND PROVIDE THEM WITH GOODS OR SERVICES WHICH MAKE THEM HAPPY. BUT WITHOUT A CLEAR MISSION, AN ORGANIZATION CANNOT BE EFFECTIVE, BECAUSE IT WILL NOT BE ABLE TO RESIST TAKING ON NEW TASKS OF ALL SORTS; SINCE IT CANNOT CLARIFY WHAT IT IS SUPPOSED TO DO, IT CAN BE ASKED TO DO WHATEVER ANYONE WANTS IT TO DO. ON THE OTHER HAND, IF IT HAS A MISSION, IT CAN SORT THROUGH REQUESTS AND ACCEPT THOSE CONSONANT WITH ITS MISSION RATHER THAN TAKING ON TASKS CATCH-AS-CATCH-CAN.

DOES ANY OF THIS SOUND FAMILIAR TO YOU? ACTUALLY, IT WOULD PROBABLY SOUND FAMILIAR TO PEOPLE IN MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF ORGANIZATIONS. ONE OF THE QUOTATIONS WHICH I HAVE FOUND PARTICULARLY TELLING ABOUT THE MALAISE OF OUR TIME IS BY ALBERT EINSTEIN, WHO SAID, "PERFECTION OF MEANS AND CONFUSION OF ENDS SEEMS TO CHARACTERIZE OUR AGE." A LOOK AROUND AT OUR INSTITUTIONS WILL PROVIDE MANY EXAMPLES OF WHAT EINSTEIN WAS TALKING ABOUT: LEVERAGED CORPORATE BUYOUTS WHICH CAN REARRANGE COMPANIES AND CHANGE THE LIVES OF INDIVIDUALS WITHOUT IMPROVING, OR EVEN AFFECTING, PRODUCTION OF GOODS AND SERVICES; COMPUTERIZED DATA SYSTEMS WHICH CAN ACCESS AND MANIPULATE DATA EVERY WHICH WAY, FOR NO CLEAR PURPOSE; PROCEDURAL COMPETENCE, IN GENERAL, WITH NO CLEAR FOCUS.

LAST YEAR I CAME ACROSS AN ARTICLE ABOUT THE SPACE SHUTTLE PROGRAM IN THE NEW YORK TIMES, AND I WAS STRUCK BY THE USE OF THE SAME TERMINOLOGY THAT EINSTEIN USED. THE ARTICLE SAID: "SO THE NUB OF THE PROBLEM FOR NASA IS THAT IT FINDS ITSELF WITH THE MEANS -- AN ADVANCED BUT EXPENSIVE SPACE TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM -- AND NO ENDS." FOR EINSTEIN, AND FOR ALL OF US, THE QUESTIONS "WHY ARE WE DOING THIS?" AND "WHERE WILL THIS LEAD?" NEED TO BE ASKED MUCH MORE OFTEN THAN THEY ARE.

EINSTEIN DID NOT -- AND CERTAINLY I DO NOT -- DENIGRATE THE

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IMPORTANCE OF "PERFECTING THE MEANS." SOCIETY NEEDS TO FIND BETTER FINANCIAL AND CORPORATE STRUCTURES TO REMAIN COMPETITIVE IN AN INTERNATIONAL ECONOMY, BETTER COMPUTER SYSTEMS TO KEEP US BETTER INFORMED, AND GREATER PROCEDURAL COMPETENCE TO DEAL WITH INCREASINGLY COMPLEX TASKS IN EVERY AREA.

THOSE OF US WHO OPERATE SCHOOL SYSTEMS NEED TO USE COMPUTER-AIDED INSTRUCTION WHERE IT IS EFFECTIVE AND HELPS FREE TEACHERS FOR MORE INDIVIDUALIZED INSTRUCTION. WE NEED MORE EFFICIENT TRANSPORTATION SYSTEMS TO GET OUR STUDENTS TO OUR SCHOOLS. MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL, WE NEED TEACHER PERFORMANCE EVALUATION TO ENSURE THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION.

I CONSIDER THE PERFORMANCE EVALUATION PROGRAM WE HAVE IMPLEMENTED IN FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO BE THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT STEP WE HAVE TAKEN TO REFORM EDUCATION. TEACHERS, THEMSELVES, ARE THE ESSENTIAL "MEANS" BY WHICH WE DO--OR DO NOT--ACHIEVE OUR PRIMARY MISSION OF EDUCATING CHILDREN. AND GOOD TEACHERS, MORE THAN ANY GROUP OF PEOPLE I KNOW, WOULD LIKE SCHOOLS TO CLARIFY THE "CONFUSION OF ENDS" THAT ALLOWS INSTRUCTIONAL PROGRAMS TO BE DILUTED AND FRAGMENTED. BUT PERFECTING THE MEANS AND SAYING THAT WE ARE CLARIFYING THE ENDS (WHICH, TOO OFTEN, MEANS ASSUMING WE HAVE DONE SO) IS NOT ENOUGH. IN FACT, NOW, MORE THAN EVER, WE MUST BE CLEAR ABOUT OUR ENDS, OUR GOALS, OUR PURPOSE, OR THIS PERFECTION OF MEANS -- THIS IMPROVEMENT IN THE QUALITY OF TEACHING -- WILL BE WASTED.

I BELIEVE THAT EDUCATION IN THE UNITED STATES IS CURRENTLY IN THE MIDST OF A CRISIS OF PURPOSE, A CONFUSION OF ENDS, A MUDDLE ABOUT ITS MISSION. IT IS NO SECRET TO ANYONE WHO FOLLOWS THE NEWS THAT AMERICA IS INVOLVED IN A SCHOOL-REFORM MOVEMENT OF UNPRECEDENTED BREADTH, DEPTH, STAYING POWER, AND NATIONAL SUPPORT. THIS REFORM MOVEMENT HAS ALREADY LED TO SUBSTANTIAL CHANGES IN EDUCATIONAL POLICY AND PRACTICE, AND HAS THE POTENTIAL TO LEAD TO MANY MORE CHANGES. BUT WHAT KINDS OF CHANGES CAN WE EXPECT FROM STATE AND NATIONAL LEVELS? LONGER SCHOOL DAYS AND YEARS? COMPETENCY TESTS FOR DIPLOMAS? INCREASED COURSE REQUIREMENTS FOR GRADUATION? STATE TAKEOVERS OF "EDUCATIONALLY BANKRUPT" SCHOOL SYSTEMS?

WILL CHANGES LIKE THESE IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF EDUCATION? MORE LOW-QUALITY INSTRUCTION DURING LONGER DAYS AND YEARS, MORE TESTING OF LOW-LEVEL SKILLS, COURSEWORK IN LOW-EXPECTATION CLASSES, AND IMPOSITION OF CONTROL FROM STATE CAPITALS WILL NOT NECESSARILY BE BETTER THAN WHAT WE HAD BEFORE. NATIONAL AND STATEWIDE CHANGES CANNOT -- BY THEMSELVES -- ENSURE THE QUALITY OF INSTRUCTION. ONLY LOCAL ACTION CAN DO THIS. FOR INSTANCE, TEACHER PROFESSIONALISM IS CRITICAL TO IMPROVING INSTRUCTIONAL QUALITY, AND STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE DEVELOPED PROGRAMS TO ENSURE THAT TEACHERS ARE HIGH-QUALITY PROFESSIONALS. REQUIRING INCREASED CREDENTIALS AND IMPOSING EXAMINATIONS FOR ENTRY INTO THE PROFESSION, REGULATING PRESERVICE PROGRAMS AND REQUIRING

INTERNSHIPS, ALLOWING MEMBERS OF OTHER OCCUPATIONS TO BECOME TEACHERS, AND OTHER STATE MEASURES, WHILE HELPFUL, ARE NO SUBSTITUTES FOR LOCAL ACTIONS, WHICH CAN TRULY PROFESSIONALIZE TEACHING AND IMPROVE INSTRUCTION.

A PROGRAM SUCH AS FAIRFAX COUNTY'S "TEACHER PAY FOR PERFORMANCE" PROGRAM, DEVELOPED AND IMPLEMENTED WITH STRONG SCHOOL BOARD AND COMMUNITY SUPPORT, PROVIDES MECHANISMS FOR ENSURING THE GENERAL QUALITY OF TEACHERS, IDENTIFYING THE POOR AND THE GREAT TEACHERS, AND PROVIDING INCENTIVES (INCLUDING MORE MONEY) AND DISINCENTIVES (INCLUDING TERMINATION OF EMPLOYMENT) AS APPROPRIATE. THIS COMPLEX AND MASSIVE PROGRAM IN A 130,000-STUDENT SCHOOL SYSTEM PROVIDES THE BASIS FOR A TRULY PROFESSIONALIZED TEACHING WORKFORCE, WHICH WILL INCLUDE IDENTIFICATION OF MASTER TEACHERS, DIFFERENTIATED STAFFING, CAREER LADDERS, AND HIGH SALARIES FOR ALL WHO MEET PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS. WHATEVER ELSE WE CHANGE, THE ONLY PROVEN INFLUENCE ON STUDENT PERFORMANCE IS TEACHING QUALITY. WHILE THE NATIONAL AND STATE CHANGES CAN DEAL WITH QUANTITY AND BROADSCALE CONTROL, ONLY LOCAL CHANGES CAN TRULY ADDRESS QUALITY.

BUT AGAIN, CHANGES IN MEANS ARE NOT ENOUGH. FOCUS ON THE ENDS, THE MISSION, IS CRITICAL TO EDUCATIONAL EXCELLENCE. MOST SCHOOL SYSTEMS HAVE "MISSION STATEMENTS," BUT THESE STATEMENTS ARE USUALLY MORE INCLUSIVE THAN EXCLUSIVE--THEY TOO OFTEN PROMISE TO DO EVERYTHING FOR EVERY CHILD. THE PHRASE "MEET THE NEEDS OF CHILDREN" OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT APPEARS IN MOST OF THE SCHOOL MISSION STATEMENTS I HAVE SEEN. IF THIS MEANS THAT THE SCHOOL'S MISSION IS TO MEET ANY AND ALL "NEEDS" WHICH ANY CHILD MIGHT HAVE, THEN I SUBMIT THAT THE SCHOOL HAS NO MISSION. IF THE SCHOOL IS RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING EVERYTHING, IT CANNOT BE HELD RESPONSIBLE FOR DOING ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR. TAKING ON TOO MUCH RESPONSIBILITY MAKES IT POSSIBLE FOR SCHOOLS TO AVOID RESPONSIBILITY FOR WHAT THEY EXIST TO DO AND WHAT THEY CAN DO. WHAT DO SCHOOLS EXIST TO DO? WHICH NEEDS OF STUDENTS DO THEY EXIST TO MEET? CHILDREN HAVE FAMILIES AND NEIGHBORHOODS, RELIGIOUS INSTITUTIONS AND DAY-CARE CENTERS, HEALTH-CARE PROVIDERS AND SCOUTING GROUPS, MANY INSTITUTIONS WHICH HELP MEET MANY OF THEIR NEEDS. BUT WHAT ARE SCHOOLS FOR?

I BELIEVE THAT SCHOOLS' MISSION IS TO PROVIDE ALL CHILDREN WITH ACADEMIC LEARNING, THAT THIS IS WHAT SCHOOLS WERE CREATED TO DO AND EXIST TO DO. THIS DOES NOT MEAN THAT THEY SHOULD NOT DO ANYTHING ELSE--FEED AND TRANSPORT STUDENTS, PROVIDE ATHLETIC OPPORTUNITIES AND HEALTH INSTRUCTION, TEACH STUDENTS TO DRIVE AND TO PERFORM CPR. IT DOES, HOWEVER, MEAN THAT SCHOOLS SHOULD DO THESE THINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF THEIR ESSENTIAL MISSION-- ACADEMIC LEARNING. THERE IS A PARTICULAR QUOTE THAT I HAVE REFERRED TO TIME AND AGAIN--A QUOTE THAT IS EVEN OLDER THAN MY ADMINISTRATIVE CAREER. OVER 30 YEARS AGO, ARTHUR BESTOR, A PROFESSOR OF HISTORY AT THE UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS AND ONE OF THE FOUNDERS OF THE COUNCIL FOR BASIC EDUCATION, WROTE THIS:

AN INDISPENSABLE FUNCTION OF EDUCATION, AT EVERY LEVEL, IS TO PROVIDE SOUND TRAINING IN THE FUNDAMENTAL WAYS OF THINKING REPRESENTED BY HISTORY, SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS, LITERATURE, LANGUAGE, ART, AND THE OTHER DISCIPLINES EVOLVED IN THE COURSE OF MANKIND'S LONG QUEST FOR USABLE KNOWLEDGE, CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING, AND INTELLECTUAL POWER. TO ADVANCE MORAL CONDUCT, RESPONSIBLE CITIZENSHIP, AND SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT IS, OF COURSE, A VITAL FUNCTION OF EDUCATION. BUT, LIKE THE OTHER AGENCIES WHICH CONTRIBUTE TO THESE ENDS, THE SCHOOL MUST WORK WITHIN THE CONTEXT PROVIDED BY ITS OWN CHARACTERISTIC ACTIVITY. IN OTHER WORDS, THE PARTICULAR CONTRIBUTION WHICH THE SCHOOL CAN MAKE IS DETERMINED BY, AND RELATED TO, THE PRIMARY FACT THAT IT IS AN AGENCY OF INTELLECTUAL TRAINING.

THIS IS AS GOOD A STATEMENT OF THE MISSION OF SCHOOLS AS YOU COULD FIND, BECAUSE IT NOT ONLY CLEARLY IDENTIFIES THAT MISSION, IT ALSO CLARIFIES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THAT MISSION AND OTHER THINGS THE SCHOOLS ARE ASKED TO DO--THE "VITAL FUNCTIONS." IN 1990, WE COULD IDENTIFY MANY MORE OF THESE VITAL FUNCTIONS, SUCH AS SEX EDUCATION, PREGNANCY CLINICS, AIDS EDUCATION, DRUG EDUCATION, BREAKFAST PROGRAMS, COMPUTER LITERACY. WE COULD ADD SEVERAL MORE, WHICH WE AGREE ARE "VITAL," OR, AT LEAST, WHICH OUR COMMUNITIES WOULD IDENTIFY AS VITAL.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS FACE DEMANDS EVERY DAY FROM THEIR COMMUNITIES. FOR INSTANCE, PARENTS' NEED FOR QUALITY DAY-CARE FACILITIES IS INCREASING RAPIDLY AS THE TWO-INCOME FAMILY BECOMES THE NORM IN MOST COMMUNITIES. SHOULD SCHOOLS MEET THIS NEED? THE CRITERIA FOR DECIDING ON AN ANSWER TO THIS QUESTION ARE CLEAR IF YOU ACCEPT MY VIEW OF THE SCHOOL'S PRIMARY MISSION. TO BEGIN WITH, THE SCHOOL IS NOT JUST A PLACE TO SEND CHILDREN FOR THE DAY. IT IS ALSO <u>NOT</u> A GENERAL SERVICE PROVIDER FOR CHILDREN. IT IS AN AGENCY OF ACADEMIC LEARNING. THIS MEANS THAT A SCHOOL CAN BE SUCCESSFUL AT FEEDING AND TRANSPORTING STUDENTS, TEACHING THEM ABOUT SEX AND DRUGS, AND DEVELOPING THEIR ETHICAL SENSIBILITIES, BUT IF IT DOES NOT PROVIDE THEM WITH ADEQUATE ACADEMIC LEARNING, IT <u>FAILS</u>. EVEN IF THE SCHOOL PROVIDES EXCELLENT DAY CARE, GOOD FOOD, HEALTH CARE, NURTURING, COUNSELING, HELPFUL HINTS FOR NEGOTIATING SOCIETY, EVERYTHING ELSE A CHILD MIGHT NEED, BUT FAILS TO PROVIDE THIS LEARNING, THE SCHOOL FAILS, BECAUSE IT IS LEARNING IN THE FUNDAMENTAL DISCIPLINES WHICH THE SCHOOL EXISTS TO PROVIDE. IF IT DOES OTHER THINGS, IT SHOULD DO THEM EITHER AS <u>MEANS</u> TO ACADEMIC LEARNING, OR AS <u>ADDITIONS</u> TO IT, BUT NEVER AS <u>SUBSTITUTES</u> FOR ACADEMIC LEARNING.

GETTING BACK TO THE DAY CARE QUESTION, SHOULD A SCHOOL PROVIDE DAY CARE? PERHAPS, BUT ONLY IF IT IS A MEANS OR AN ADDITION TO ACADEMIC LEARNING. DOES PROVIDING DAY CARE BEYOND THE SCHOOL DAY HELP CHILDREN LEARN? ARE THE CHILDREN ALREADY LEARNING WELL, AND CAN DAY-CARE BE PROVIDED WITHOUT DIVERTING LIMITED RESOURCES OR

OTHERWISE INTERFERING WITH ACADEMIC SUCCESS? THESE ARE THE KINDS OF QUESTIONS A SCHOOL SYSTEM OUGHT TO ASK AS IT CONSIDERS WHETHER TO PROVIDE DAY CARE OR ANY OTHER SERVICE BEYOND INSTRUCTION.

THE SCHOOLS DO MANY VALUABLE THINGS FOR CHILDREN, AND MANY OF THESE THINGS CONTRIBUTE TO ACADEMIC LEARNING--MAKE IT POSSIBLE, MAKE IT EASIER, MAKE IT RELEVANT. MANY OTHER THINGS WHICH THE SCHOOLS DO THEY DO BECAUSE ALL (AT LEAST MOST) YOUNG PEOPLE ARE IN SCHOOL, SO THAT IF YOU WANT TO BE SURE ALL YOUNG PEOPLE GET A PARTICULAR SERVICE OR A PARTICULAR OPPORTUNITY, SCHOOL IS THE PLACE TO DO THAT. BUT THE SCHOOL SHOULD DO ALL THESE THINGS IN THE CONTEXT OF ITS PRIMARY MISSION OF ACADEMIC LEARNING--AND I MEAN TO SAY "LEARNING," NOT JUST "TEACHING." LEARNING ISN'T MEANINGFUL IF TEACHERS DON'T MAKE IT SO. STUDENTS WON'T LEARN IF THE SCHOOL IS NOT A SIGNIFICANT PLACE FOR THEM. WE NEED TO ENSURE ALL THESE CONDITIONS OF THE ATMOSPHERE IN WHICH LEARNING CAN TAKE PLACE.

SO THE FOCUS ON ACADEMIC LEARNING MEANS THAT SCHOOLS MUST REVIEW THE OTHER FUNCTIONS THEY ARE CARRYING OUT AND THOSE THEY ARE BEING ASKED TO UNDERTAKE TO SEE IF THESE FUNCTIONS ENHANCE LEARNING OR CAN BE TAKEN ON WITHOUT DIVERTING LIMITED RESOURCES FROM ACTIVITIES WHICH PROMOTE ACADEMIC LEARNING. DOES THIS MEAN THAT SCHOOL SYSTEMS SHOULD TELL THEIR COMMUNITIES THEY CANNOT PERFORM ALL THE FUNCTIONS THEY ARE ASKED TO PERFORM? PERHAPS -- IF THESE FUNCTIONS INTERFERE WITH THE SCHOOLS' MISSION. BUT THE POINT HERE IS NOT REDUCED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SCHOOLS. IN FACT, IF ANYTHING, THIS CONCEPT OF THE MISSION OF SCHOOLS INCREASES SCHOOLS' RESPONSIBILITY BY FOCUSING THAT RESPONSIBILITY.

EDUCATIONAL DECISION MAKERS HAVE A LOT OF WORK TO DO IF THEY ARE TO REALIZE THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLS. THE CURRENT SCHOOL-REFORM MOVEMENT DOES NOT EXIST BECAUSE OUR YOUNG PEOPLE WERE NOT GETTING ENOUGH TO EAT, WERE COMING DOWN WITH AIDS, WERE OUT OF SHAPE, OR HAD TO WALK FIVE MILES TO SCHOOL. IT EXISTS BECAUSE OUR STUDENTS, SPECIFIC GROUPS OF THEM AND OVERALL, WERE NOT RECEIVING AN ADEQUATE ACADEMIC EDUCATION. IF SCHOOLS ACCEPT AND BELIEVE THAT PROVIDING THIS EDUCATION IS THEIR MISSION -- THAT THEY ARE FAILING IF THEY DON'T PROVIDE IT-- THEN THEY--WE--NEED TO WORK DOUBLY HARD TO ENSURE THAT WE ACHIEVE OUR MISSION. AND THERE IS AN INCREASING PERCEPTION, AND INCREASING EVIDENCE, THAT WE DO NEED TO WORK HARDER.

TWO YEARS AGO, IT WAS REPORTS ON EDUCATION IN THE HUMANITIES DISCIPLINES, REPORTS SUCH AS "AMERICAN MEMORY," BY LYNNE V. CHENEY, CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL ENDOWMENT FOR THE HUMANITIES, WHICH SURVEYED STUDENT KNOWLEDGE IN SUBJECTS SUCH AS HISTORY, LITERATURE, AND LANGUAGES AND FOUND IT WANTING. LAST YEAR, IT WAS REPORTS ON MATHEMATICS AND SCIENCE, SUCH AS THE NATIONAL ASSESSMENT OF EDUCATIONAL PROGRESS REPORT THAT SHOWED STUDENTS WITH VERY LOW LEVELS OF SCIENTIFIC UNDERSTANDING, AND THE

NATIONAL SURVEY OF SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS EDUCATION, WHICH REPORTED THAT THE AMOUNT OF "HANDS-ON" SCIENCE INSTRUCTION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS DECLINED BETWEEN 1977 AND 1986, EVEN THOUGH SCIENCE TEACHERS BELIEVE THAT THIS TYPE OF INSTRUCTION IS MORE EFFECTIVE THAN THE LECTURE-RESPONSE STRATEGIES WHICH THEY OFTEN USE. MORE RECENTLY, INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS OF MATH COMPETENCE SHOW OUR STUDENTS COMPARING UNFAVORABLY WITH THOSE IN OTHER COUNTRIES BUT HAVING VERY HIGH ESTIMATIONS OF THEIR COMPETENCE; THIS SOUNDS LIKE A VICTORY FOR SELF-ESTEEM OVER ACTUAL LEARNING.

ONE REASON WE DO POORLY IN THESE INTERNATIONAL COMPARISONS IS OUR OVEREMPHASIS ON "BASIC SKILLS," THE KIND TESTED ON OUR UBIQUITOUS STANDARDIZED TESTS--THE KIND FOUND IN NO OTHER COUNTRY I KNOW OF. WHAT SHOULD OUR STUDENTS BE LEARNING? NOT JUST KNOWLEDGE, BUT UNDERSTANDING OF ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES MUST BE SCHOOLS' GOAL. NEITHER MEMORIZATION OF FACTS NOR "THINKING SKILLS" WITHOUT CONTENT CAN BE OUR FOCUS. ABILITY TO SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT HISTORY, SCIENCE, MATHEMATICS, LITERATURE, AND THE ARTS, RATHER THAN JUST THE ABILITY TO SCORE WELL ON STANDARDIZED OBJECTIVE TESTS, SHOULD BE THE MEASURE OF OUR SUCCESS. IT SEEMS CLEAR THAT, IF WE ARE GOING TO PROVIDE ACCOUNTABILITY FOR THIS KIND OF LEARNING, WE ARE GOING TO NEED BETTER TESTS, TESTS WHICH MEASURE THESE ABILITIES. AS CHECKER FINN HAS SAID, "THERE'S NOTHING WRONG WITH TEACHING TO THE TEST AS LONG AS IT'S A GOOD TEST."

WHY SHOULD "UNDERSTANDING" --RATHER THAN JUST FACTS AND SKILLS -- BE OUR GOAL? I LEAVE IT TO EMPLOYERS TO EXPLAIN THE IMPORTANCE OF UNDERSTANDING (E.G., OF INVENTORY CONTROL) FOR EMPLOYABILITY AND COMPETITIVENESS, BUT LET US TAKE A LOOK AT THE "CITIZENSHIP" GOAL OF EDUCATION. DURING THE 1988 PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, AMERICAN POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA WAS AN IMPORTANT ISSUE. HOW MANY VOTERS NOT ONLY KNEW WHERE NICAURAGUA AND ITS NEIGHBORS ARE LOCATED AND WHO ORTEGA AND ARIAS ARE, BUT WHAT HAS BEEN THE HISTORY OF THIS REGION AND OF UNITED STATES POLICY IN CENTRAL AMERICA? THIS REQUIRES NOT JUST KNOWLEDGE OF NAMES AND DATES AND NOT JUST SKILLS SUCH AS ANALYSIS AND GENERALIZATION BUT THE INTERACTION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS WHICH CONSTITUTES "UNDERSTANDING." ANOTHER CAMPAIGN ISSUE WAS THE FEDERAL BUDGET. HOW MANY VOTERS REACTED TO "TAXES" AS A FOUR-LETTER WORD? HOW MANY HAVE AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE FEDERAL DEFICIT, WHY WE HAVE ONE, WHY IT GOT SO BIG, AND THE EFFECTS OF THE SIZE OF THE DEFICIT ON NATIONAL COMPETITIVENESS, MILITARY STRENGTH, AND THEIR OWN HOUSEHOLD BUDGETS? SCIENTIST CARL SAGAN NOTES THAT VOTERS NEED TO HAVE SOME UNDERSTANDING OF NUCLEAR FISSION AND FUSION BEFORE THEY CAN VOTE INTELLIGENTLY ON LONG-RANGE ENERGY POLICIES. HOW MANY UNDERSTAND HOW THESE TWO TYPES OF NUCLEAR ENERGY DIFFER, MUCH LESS HOW THEY ARE OR COULD BE HARNESSED TO PROVIDE ELECTRIC POWER?

THERE ARE MANY REASONS WHY THE SCHOOL'S MISSION IS IMPORTANT. A BETTER EDUCATED CITIZENRY WILL ENSURE BETTER GOVERNMENT; BETTER EDUCATED INDIVIDUALS WILL LIVE MORE SATISFYING LIVES. BUT LET ME CITE A REASON THAT EVERYONE, FROM ALL POINTS ON THE POLITICAL SPECTRUM, CAN RELATE TO. AS MANY OTHERS HAVE POINTED OUT, AMERICA'S COMPETITIVE EDGE IN THE WORLD ECONOMY DEPENDS ON OUR KNOWLEDGE AND CREATIVITY--OUR ABILITY TO "WORK SMARTER," AND THIS ABILITY DEPENDS ON EDUCATION.

THE 1986 REPORT OF THE CARNEGIE CORPORATION'S FORUM ON EDUCATION AND THE ECONOMY--"A NATION PREPARED: TEACHERS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY"--NOTES THAT AMERICA CANNOT COMPETE IN LOW-SKILLED INDUSTRIES WITHOUT ACCEPTING PREVAILING WORLD WAGE LEVELS. "IN THE FUTURE," THIS REPORT NOTES, "HIGH WAGE-LEVEL SOCIETIES WILL BE THOSE WHOSE ECONOMIES ARE BASED ON A WIDE SCALE OF VERY HIGHLY SKILLED WORKERS BACKED UP BY THE MOST HIGHLY ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES AVAILABLE." IN OTHER WORDS, IF WE DON'T EDUCATE THE NEXT GENERATIONS TO HIGHER LEVELS THAN PREVIOUS ONES, WE WILL ALL SUFFER. THE REST OF THE WORLD WILL UNDERCUT US ON EITHER PRICE, OR QUALITY, OR BOTH, AND SOCIAL SECURITY AND MEDICARE WILL NOT BE THERE FOR US IN OUR DOTAGE.

THERE ARE MANY QUICK-FIX ARTISTS IN GOVERNMENT AND IN THE EDUCATION BUSINESS. THOSE IN GOVERNMENT OFTEN TRY TO COME UP WITH SIMPLE LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS TO WORLD ECONOMIC PROBLEMS: IS JAPAN CURRENTLY OUR GREATEST ECONOMIC COMPETITOR? "TEACH MORE JAPANESE IN THE SCHOOLS." DO WE NEED TO DEVELOP MARKETS IN THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES? "SCRAP WESTERN HISTORY FOR A ONE-SEMESTER TOUR OF THIRD-WORLD COUNTRIES." AMONG THE QUICK-FIX EDUCATORS ARE PEOPLE WHO WILL TELL US THAT MORE OF THIS AND LESS OF THAT ARE WHAT WE NEED -- MORE COMPUTERS, LESS HISTORY, MORE GUIDANCE COUNSELORS, LESS EVALUATION. IN FACT, THERE IS NO QUICK FIX; IMPARTING AND ACQUIRING A SOLID ACADEMIC EDUCATION TAKES A LONG TIME, BUT WE DO KNOW HOW TO DO IT -- GOOD TEACHERS, GOOD CURRICULUM, PLENTY OF SUPPORT FOR INSTRUCTION, FOCUS ON DEVELOPING INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES. THE BEST EDUCATORS KNOW THAT GOOD TEACHERS, IN A SUPPORTIVE ATMOSPHERE, CAN DO THIS OVER TIME WITH PRACTICALLY ANY STUDENT. ALL THIS IS EASY TO SAY. IT SOUNDS SIMPLE. BUT THOSE WHO WORK IN SCHOOL SYSTEMS KNOW THAT IT ISN'T.

THE FACT IS THAT MANY OF OUR STUDENTS ARE ALIENATED FROM SCHOOL. SOME ARE HUNGRY OR FRIGHTENED WHEN THEY COME TO SCHOOL, SOME HAVE POOR HOME LIVES, SOME ARE ADDICTED TO DRUGS OR ALCOHOL. STUDENTS BRING TO SCHOOL MANY PROBLEMS WHICH INTERFERE WITH LEARNING, AND SCHOOLS OFTEN HAVE TO DEAL WITH THESE PROBLEMS IN ORDER FOR CHILDREN TO LEARN. BUT SCHOOLS MAKE A MISTAKE IF THEY SEE SOLVING THESE PROBLEMS AS THEIR MISSION. WHEN SCHOOLS DEAL WITH SUCH PROBLEMS, THEY MUST DO SO IN A WAY WHICH IS CONDUCIVE TO ACADEMIC LEARNING.

FOR EXAMPLE, MANY STUDENTS HAVE LOW SELF-ESTEEM, AND THESE STUDENTS OFTEN HAVE OTHER PROBLEMS STEMMING FROM LOW SELF-ESTEEM. I REMEMBER A PROGRAM IN A CITY SCHOOL I VISITED WHICH WAS DESIGNED TO INCREASE STUDENT SELF-ESTEEM. THAT SCHOOL WAS GRADUATING FUNCTIONAL ILLITERATES WHO FELT GOOD ABOUT THEMSELVES. HOW CRUEL! HOW TRAGIC! PROVIDING YOUNG PEOPLE WITH UNEARNED DIPLOMAS IS NOT THE SCHOOLS' MISSION. REMEMBER BESTOR: "THE PARTICULAR CONTRIBUTION WHICH THE SCHOOL CAN MAKE IS DETERMINED BY, AND RELATED TO, THE PRIMARY FACT THAT IT IS AN AGENCY OF INTELLECTUAL TRAINING." SUCCESS AND MASTERY ARE ANTIDOTES FOR LOW SELF-ESTEEM; SCHOOLS NEED TO HELP STUDENTS TO ACHIEVE SUCCESS IN, AND MASTERY OF, ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES. SOME STUDENTS ARE FRIGHTENED BY A WORLD OUTSIDE THE SCHOOL WHICH THEY CANNOT UNDERSTAND OR NEGOTIATE. IT IS AMAZING HOW MUCH UNDERSTANDING OF THE WORLD A STUDENT CAN GAIN BY LEARNING TO UNDERSTAND SCIENCE, HISTORY, LITERATURE, MATHEMATICS, AND THE ARTS. THIS, BY THE WAY, IS NOT AN UNDERSTANDING WHICH A STUDENT WILL GET FROM THE PRINT MEDIA, WHICH, AS CARL SAGAN NOTED IN HIS RECENT VISIT TO A FAIRFAX COUNTY SCHOOL, DEVOTE MORE SPACE TO ASTROLOGY IN A SINGLE DAY THAN TO ASTRONOMY IN A MONTH.

IF SCHOOLS AFFIRM THAT THEY ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR STUDENTS' ACADEMIC LEARNING, THEN THEY MUST ACCEPT THAT RESPONSIBILITY FOR ALL STUDENTS; THEY MUST OPERATE ON THE BELIEF THAT ALL STUDENTS CAN LEARN. I AGREE STRONGLY WITH THE COLLEGE BOARD'S PUBLICATION "ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD OF WORK," A REPORT ON WHAT BUSINESS PEOPLE AND OTHERS SAID THEY WANTED THEIR HIGH-SCHOOL-EDUCATED EMPLOYEES TO HAVE LEARNED. THIS REPORT SAYS THAT "HIGH-QUALITY ACADEMIC PREPARATION FOR ALL STUDENTS IS MORE IMPORTANT NOW THAN AT ANY OTHER TIME IN OUR NATION'S HISTORY."

IN OTHER WORDS, WE CAN NO LONGER SAY THAT ONLY THE COLLEGE-BOUND SHOULD HAVE A STRONG ACADEMIC EDUCATION, EVEN IF WE ASSUME--AS I WOULD NOT--THAT PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD OF WORK SHOULD BE THE ONLY EDUCATIONAL GOAL FOR THE NON-COLLEGE-BOUND. IF ANYTHING, IT IS MORE IMPORTANT THAT THE NON-COLLEGE-BOUND RECEIVE A STRONG ACADEMIC EDUCATION IN ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL THAN IT IS FOR THE COLLEGE BOUND. THOSE GOING ON TO COLLEGE WILL HAVE OPPORTUNITIES TO ACQUIRE ACADEMIC LEARNING THERE. FOR THOSE NOT GOING TO COLLEGE, ELEMENTARY AND SECONDARY SCHOOL ARE LIKELY TO BE THEIR LAST OPPORTUNITY TO ACQUIRE ACADEMIC LEARNING. BY PROVIDING ALL STUDENTS WITH ACADEMIC LEARNING, THE SCHOOLS ARE DOING WHAT THEY CAN TO OPPOSE ELITISM AND TO FOSTER EQUALITY.

I REMEMBER THE GREAT SOCIOLOGIST (AND MY FORMER BOSS) KENNETH CLARK -- WHEN HE WAS ON THE NEW YORK STATE BOARD OF REGENTS -- ARGUING AGAINST PROVIDING ACADEMIC EDUCATION ONLY FOR THE COLLEGE-BOUND; HE CALLED IT "JIM CROW EDUCATION." THE INTELLECTUAL POWER OF ACADEMIC LEARNING CAN BE DEVELOPED, IN SOME MEASURE, IN ALL CHILDREN, AND IT IS ELITIST TO BELIEVE THAT IT CANNOT.

IF SOME OF OUR STUDENTS, EVEN MOST OF OUR STUDENTS, ARE ACHIEVING ADEQUATE ACADEMIC LEARNING WHILE OTHERS ARE NOT, THE SCHOOL IS NOT SUCCESSFUL. CERTAINLY, WE ARE NOT BEING SUCCESSFUL IF WE INSTITUTIONALLY SHUNT SOME STUDENTS INTO NON-ACADEMIC CURRICULA. ONE OF THE TRAGEDIES OF SOME EARLIER EFFORTS TO RAISE THE RATE OF GRADUATION FOR MINORITY STUDENTS OR FOR STUDENTS WITH LOW SOCIOECONOMIC BACKGROUNDS IS THAT HIGH SCHOOLS GRADUATED STUDENTS WITH DIPLOMAS BUT WITH LITTLE KNOWLEDGE OR UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES THEY HAD SUPPOSEDLY SPENT TWELVE YEARS STUDYING. THE PERCENTAGE OF ITS STUDENTS WHO RECEIVE DIPLOMAS IS NOT A MEASURE OF A SCHOOL'S SUCCESS. A DIPLOMA IS NOT AN END IN ITSELF BUT HAS VALUE ONLY AS A SYMBOL OF WHAT A STUDENT HAS LEARNED. WHAT THE STUDENT HAS LEARNED IS THE ONLY MEASURE OF A SCHOOL'S SUCCESS. TODAY, WE ARE MAKING SOME PROGRESS IN ACTUALLY RAISING ACHIEVEMENT--NOT JUST GRADUATION RATES--AMONG THESE STUDENTS. BUT THEY ARE NOT THE ONLY ONES GRADUATING WITHOUT ADEQUATE ACADEMIC LEARNING. SUCH GRADUATES CAN BE FOUND IN ALL TYPES OF COMMUNITIES AND WITH ALL TYPES OF BACKGROUNDS--GRADUATES OF THE "SHOPPING-MALL HIGH SCHOOL."

THAT MANY STUDENTS FROM MANY DIFFERENT BACKGROUNDS ARE DISAFFECTED, UNINTERESTED IN ACADEMICS, IS NOT AN EXCUSE--BUT A CHALLENGE--FOR SCHOOLS. I HAVE ALREADY SPOKEN OF MANY PROBLEMS WHICH STUDENTS BRING TO SCHOOL AND WHICH SCHOOLS NEED TO ALLEVIATE SO THAT THESE STUDENTS CAN LEARN. DISAFFECTION MAY BE THE MOST WIDESPREAD--PARTICULARLY IN OUR LARGE SUBURBAN SCHOOLS. UNFORTUNATELY, SOME TEACHERS ARE ALSO AMONG THE DISAFFECTED (NOT IN FAIRFAX COUNTY, OF COURSE, WHERE TEACHER-PAY-FOR-PERFORMANCE IS WEEDING THEM OUT). THESE DISAFFECTED ARE THE LAST TEACHERS WHO SHOULD BE TEACHING DISAFFECTED STUDENTS. BUT ALL OF US IN EDUCATION KNOW TEACHERS WHO CAN REACH THE DISAFFECTED, WHO CAN MAKE LITERATURE, SCIENCE, THE ARTS, MATHEMATICS, HISTORY, AND LANGUAGES REAL AND INTERESTING TO THESE STUDENTS.

WE NEED TO REWARD THESE TEACHERS, BRING THEM TO THE FORE, FOCUS SCHOOLS ON DOING WHAT THESE TEACHERS ARE DOING, AND PROVIDE WHAT THE SCHOOLS NEED TO DO IT. THE HIGHEST STATUS AND THE HIGHEST SALARIES OUGHT TO GO TO TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS WHO CAN REACH THESE STUDENTS. PERFORMANCE PAY AND OTHER KINDS OF REWARDS WHICH BOTH MOTIVATE AND RECOGNIZE EXCEPTIONAL EDUCATORS MUST BECOME PART OF THE ETHOS OF SCHOOLS. IN FAIRFAX COUNTY, WE ARE DOING THIS; IN FAIRFAX COUNTY, TEACHER PROFESSIONALIZATION IS CHANGING THE CULTURE OF TEACHING. NOT EVERYONE SUPPORTS THIS PROGRAM. I HAVE MY CRITICS, THANK GOODNESS, WHO HELP KEEP ME CHALLENGED AND WHOSE CRITICISM RENEWS MY DEDICATION TO WHAT WE ARE TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH. BUT, IN SPITE OF THE CRITICISM, IT IS HAPPENING: TEACHERS ARE CHANGING THEIR ATTITUDES TOWARD WHAT THEY DO; THEY ARE BECOMING TRUE PROFESSIONALS.

ENSURING ACADEMIC LEARNING IS A COMPLICATED BUSINESS. PERHAPS THE MOST SIGNIFICANT THING WE COULD DO IS TO ENSURE THAT OUR CURRICULUM DEVELOPERS AND LEAD TEACHERS HAVE A COMBINATION OF STRONG ACADEMIC BACKGROUND AND ABILITY TO MAKE SENSE OF ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE. I WANT TO SEE SOME BREAKTHROUGHS IN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITY DEPARTMENTS IN THOSE DISCIPLINES WHICH OUR SCHOOLS ARE TEACHING, AND BREAKTHROUGHS IN THE BARRIERS BETWEEN SCHOOLS OF EDUCATION AND THE OTHER SCHOOLS IN THE UNIVERSITIES. WE HAVE SOME PROMISING STARTS IN FAIRFAX, WHERE A FEW DOZEN TEACHERS HAVE EARNED THE DESIGNATION "CLINICAL FACULTY" AT A NEARBY UNIVERSITY, BUT WE NEED MORE BREAKTHROUGHS SO THAT OUR ACADEMICALLY WELL-PREPARED PUBLIC-SCHOOL TEACHERS CAN RECEIVE THE KIND OF RECOGNITION THAT COLLEGE PROFESSORS NOW RECEIVE. WE MUST WORK ON RAISING THE QUALITY AND THE STATUS OF OUR TEACHERS.

TO ME, THE MISSION OF THE SCHOOLS IS CLEAR, BUT I HAVE SEEN THAT MISSION CLOUDED, CONFUSED, AND CONFOUNDED OVER THE LAST THIRTY YEARS. RECENT EVENTS IN EDUCATION REFORM HAVE GIVEN ME CAUSE FOR HOPE. PERHAPS THE REALIZATION THAT EXCELLENCE AND EQUITY IN EDUCATION CANNOT BE SEPARATED IS THE MOST IMPORTANT DEVELOPMENT OVER THE PAST SIX YEARS, THE REALIZATION THAT WE CANNOT CONDEMN OUR DEPRIVED STUDENTS TO SECOND-RATE EDUCATION. ANOTHER POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IS THE REALIZATION THAT EDUCATION IN ACADEMIC DISCIPLINES--RATHER THAN LEARNING ONLY ABOUT THE WORLD THE STUDENT ENCOUNTERS IN HIS OR HER DAILY LIFE--IS THE BEST PREPARATION FOR THE FUTURE. IN THE WORDS OF BYRON: "THE BEST OF PROPHETS OF THE FUTURE IS THE PAST."

HOW DO WE PROVIDE THIS PREPARATION? WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS DONE, AND WHAT GETS MEASURED GETS NOTICED; LET'S MAKE SURE WE MEASURE THE IMPORTANT THINGS -- ACADEMIC LEARNING, TRUE UNDERSTANDING, THE ABILITY TO SPEAK AND WRITE ABOUT WHAT STUDENTS ARE LEARNING. I AM ENCOURAGED BY RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN TESTING TOWARD WHAT IS CALLED "AUTHENTIC ASSESSMENTS." IF WE WANT STUDENTS TO BE ABLE TO FORMULATE THEIR OWN ANSWERS, THEIR OWN IDEAS, THEN WE SHOULD TEST THAT DIRECTLY WITH ESSAYS, ORAL EXAMS, SCIENCE PRACTICUMS, ETC. OTHER NATIONS ALREADY DO THIS ON A NATIONAL SCALE; WHY CAN'T WE DO IT?

EDUCATIONAL LEADERS MUST BE TRULY LEADERS AND NOT JUST MANAGERS. THIS MEANS THEY MUST HAVE A VISION AND COMMUNICATE IT TO THEIR TEACHERS, PRINCIPALS, AND COMMUNITIES. THEY NEED TO ALLOCATE RESOURCES WHERE THEY WILL ACCOMPLISH THE SCHOOL'S MISSION--ACADEMIC LEARNING--AND ACCOMPLISH IT FOR ALL STUDENTS. AND LEADERS NEED TO HAVE THE SELF-DISCIPLINE TO MAKE THE TOUGH DECISIONS, TO INSIST ON FOCUSING ON ACADEMIC LEARNING. COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS SELDOM HAVE THE CAPACITY TO ABANDON FUNCTIONS, BUT EDUCATIONAL LEADERS MUST GET SCHOOL SYSTEMS TO ELIMINATE ASPECTS OF YESTERDAY IN ORDER TO MAKE ROOM FOR TOMORROW.

AS THEY EXERCISE THEIR LEADERSHIP, AS THEY IMPROVE THE MEANS, AS THEY DEAL WITH THE NEXT WAVE OF REFORM, EDUCATIONAL LEADERS MUST ALWAYS FOCUS ON OUR MISSION. I LOOK FORWARD TO FURTHER FOCUS, FURTHER REFORMS, FURTHER IMPROVEMENT, AND A GENERATION OF AMERICANS WHO ARE TRULY EDUCATED -- THAT IS, EDUCATED TO DEAL WITH A FUTURE WHICH WE CANNOT PREDICT.